

The Place of Israel and Christian Zionism in Anglican Evangelicalism
Those For and Against the Movement

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Introduction

The place of Israel in relationship to the church has occupied theological discussions since the birth of the church in the New Testament. Such a discussion has increased in interest among theologians with the formation of the modern state of Israel and the Christian Zionist movement that continues to hold significant influence among evangelicals today. The place of Israel's relationship to the church, as well as the movement of Christian Zionism (which Donald Lewis defines as "the belief that the Jewish people were destined by God to have a national homeland in Palestine and that Christians are obliged to support the Jewish state"¹), offers a fascinating historical discussion within Anglican evangelicalism. While members of "mainstream" Anglican evangelicalism generally aligned with a supersessionist replacement theology, a group of key Anglican evangelicals not only adhered to a church/Israel distinction theology, but were vital players in the Christian Zionism movement which led to the formation of the modern state of Israel. This paper will answer the question of what is the extent of a positive theological value of Christian Zionism in Anglican evangelicalism with specific focus on the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The historical roots of the movement, along with the roles three key individuals (Joseph Frey, Lord Shaftsbury, and William Hechler) contributed to the movement will be examined, with a brief survey of the New Christian Zionism movement proposed by Gerald McDermott and a brief examination of those against the movement concluding the paper.

Historical Roots

The historical roots of a positive place of Israel and Christian Zionism within Anglican Evangelicalism run deep and focus on two key aspects: the evangelism of the Jewish people and

¹ Donald M. Lewis, "Evangelicals and Jews Together?: Exploring the Roots of Christian Zionism," *Crux* 45 (2009): 2.

the restoration of the land of the nation of Israel. Each aspect is fleshed out among four factors which influenced the Christian Zionist movement within Anglican evangelicalism: Calvinism and Puritanism, Pietism, the Clapham Sect, and the relationship between premillennialism, postmillennialism, and dispensationalism.

At the heart of the historical roots of Christian Zionism within Anglican evangelicalism is its influence of Calvinism and Puritanism. While Calvin adhered to a supercessionist view that the church replaced Old Testament Israel and was the inheritor of Israel's promises through a spiritual hermeneutical reading of the biblical text, some later Calvinists within Anglican evangelicalism began to shift their hermeneutic to a literal reading of the Bible which retained the promises made to Israel as distinct from those of the Gentile church.² They interpreted Romans 11:25 to mean the literal salvation of the Jewish people, as well as a physical restoration of their land in Israel. However, Calvinist Puritans also viewed Britain as a type of "chosen nation" modeled after Old Testament Israel to lead the Christian world and to protect God's Old Testament "chosen nation:" Israel.³

A second major influence on Anglican evangelicalism was the German Pietist movement. As Puritanism began to wane in theological popularity, German Pietism was ready to take its place. As did Puritanism, Pietism sought reformation and revival within the church, in this case German Lutheranism. Philip Spener, a major founder and leader within Pietism, advocated for a mass evangelization of the Jewish people and considered such evangelization at the forefront of Protestantism. However, German Pietism was not particularly concerned with the restoration of the land of Israel and instead focused the entirety of its energy upon Jewish evangelization. Such

² Gerald R. McDermott, "Can Evangelicals Support Christian Zionism?" *Evangelical Review of Theology* 43 (2019): 257.

³ Lewis, "Evangelicals and Jews Together?: Exploring the Roots of Christian Zionism," 2; 6–7.

a concern for the Jewish people still contributed heavily toward later the Christian Zionist movement as it expanded its focus to include restoring the land of Israel to the Jews.⁴

Another influence on Christian Zionism within Anglican evangelicalism is what is known as the “Clapham Sect.” This Anglican group (which included William Wilberforce) influenced both British politics and mission activity.⁵ Just as with Pietism, the Clapham Sect focused heavily upon the evangelism of the Jewish people, but did so at the expense of not focusing heavily upon the restoration of the land of Israel to the Jews.⁶ The Clapham Sect particularly influenced members of the British aristocracy such as Lord Shaftsbury who became a key figure in the Christian Zionist movement within Anglican evangelicalism.

The relationship among premillennialism, postmillennialism, and dispensationalism, and their influences in Christian Zionism also warrants mention. It is generally believed that the Christian Zionist movement is primarily a movement resulting from dispensationalism. While dispensationalism has played a major role in the modern Christian Zionist movement and continues to be one of the major theological positions which advocates for Christian Zionism, Christian Zionism predates dispensationalism by eighteen centuries, and a wealth of Christian Zionists came before dispensationalism (including the key figures in this paper).⁷

Furthermore, Christian Zionism was not restricted to premillennialism but included postmillennialists (such as Johnathan Edwards) in the movement.⁸ Anglican Evangelicals began

⁴ Lewis, “Evangelicals and Jews Together?: Exploring the Roots of Christian Zionism,” 2–4.

⁵ Anthony C. Thiselton, *The Thiselton Companion to Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2015), 246.

⁶ Donald M. Lewis, *The Origins of Christian Zionism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 60.

⁷ Gerald R. McDermott, *The New Christian Zionism: Fresh Perspectives on Israel and the Land* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2016), 11; 46.

to focus on the evangelism of the Jewish people prior to the popular theological shift from postmillennialism to premillennialism.⁹ Donald Lewis argues that the shift to a literal hermeneutical reading of the biblical text by Calvinist Puritans was that which “resonated with the idea of the divine ‘election’ of the Jews,” not particularly the shift from postmillennialism to premillennialism.¹⁰ However, one should not rule out that a popular theological shift from postmillennialism to premillennialism did not occur, nor rule out that such a shift had no impact upon Anglican Evangelism’s involvement in Christian Zionism. There was a popular theological shift among many Anglican evangelicals to embrace premillennialism over postmillennialism, primarily due to how the movement of Romanticism influenced the culture and led to the deterioration of current international affairs¹¹ such as the French Revolution.¹² Such current events caused many within Anglicanism to re-examine eschatology in light of a premillennial interpretation, which contributed to a greater appreciation of the role of Israel and a Christian Zionist movement within this eschatological framework. It is important to note that, contrary to the current theological consensus, while premillennialism played a role within Anglican evangelicalism’s Christian Zionism, the movement as a whole pre-dates the theological shift to premillennialism and incorporates adherents to postmillennialism as well.

⁸. Gerald R. McDermott, *Israel Matters: Why Christians Must Think Differently About the People and the Land* (Ada: Brazos Press, 2017), 38.

⁹. Lewis, “Evangelicals and Jews Together?: Exploring the Roots of Christian Zionism,” 6.

¹⁰. Lewis, *The Origins of Christian Zionism*, 66; 68; 156.

¹¹. Lewis, *The Origins of Christian Zionism*, 67–68; 88.

¹². David Fuse-Roberts, “The Victorian Evangelical Shaftsbury: A Son of the Clapham Sect or a Brother of the Recordites?,” *The Churchman* 128 (2014): 125–26.

Joseph Frey

David Bogue preached a sermon before the London Missionary Society (LMS) in 1806 to spur interest in British evangelism of the Jews.¹³ His sermon paved the way for the formation of the largest Evangelical Jewish missionary society, the London Society for Promoting Christianity Among the Jews (LSJ). The society was formed by Joseph Frey, a Jewish convert to Christianity, who fleshed out and brought to the mainstream the concept of Jewish evangelization within German Pietism. He previously served at the London Missionary Society before branching off to form the LSJ. The LSJ began on a bit of a rocky start, but was later re-aligned as an Anglican missionary society instead of an inter-denominational missionary society after Frey departed England to engage in Jewish missionary activity in America.¹⁴ The LSJ could be considered a precursor to the modern “Jews for Jesus.”

The society was formed in 1809 to fulfill the Pauline mandate that the Gospel should be given “to the Jew first.” As did Pietism, the society considered evangelization to the Jewish people at the forefront of global missions. It also interpreted Genesis 12:3 in that by engaging in Jewish evangelization, Britain would be blessed which would lead to Britain’s expansion of its political empire.¹⁵ Yeats summarized the mission work of the LSJ best when he said: “the Jews

¹³ J. M. Yeats, “‘To the Jew First’: Conversion of the Jews as the Foundation for Global Missions and Expansion in Nineteenth-Century British Evangelicalism,” *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 47 (2005): 208.

¹⁴ Lewis, “Evangelicals and Jews Together?: Exploring the Roots of Christian Zionism,” 4–5.

¹⁵ Yeats, “‘To the Jew First’: Conversion of the Jews as the Foundation for Global Missions and Expansion in Nineteenth-Century British Evangelicalism,” 207–8.

were construed as the theological axis upon which all of theology, missiology and eschatology turned.”¹⁶

The re-alignment of the LSJ under Anglican evangelicalism caused it to branch out into an international Jewish evangelistic society versus primarily focusing upon Jewish evangelization in Britain. This caused some members to branch off from the LSJ to form the Philo-Judaeae Society in 1827. At its height, the LSJ was the largest producer and distributor of English material concerning the Jews and Jewish evangelism and played a major role in Jewish evangelism which helped further the Christian Zionist movement.¹⁷

Lord Shaftsbury

The major player in the Christian Zionist movement in the nineteenth century was Lord Shaftsbury.¹⁸ Influenced by Bickersteth’s shift from postmillennialism to historic premillennialism (Bickersteth was also involved in the LSJ and, together with Shaftsbury, led to the establishment of a Protestant bishopric in Jerusalem¹⁹)²⁰ and the Clapham Sect,²¹ he held to the Puritan view concerning the reestablishment of the land of Israel as a Jewish nation and the return of the Jewish people to the land of Israel.²² He served as the President of the LSJ,²³ and he

¹⁶ Yeats, “‘To the Jew First’: Conversion of the Jews as the Foundation for Global Missions and Expansion in Nineteenth-Century British Evangelicalism,” 212–13.

¹⁷ Yeats, “‘To the Jew First’: Conversion of the Jews as the Foundation for Global Missions and Expansion in Nineteenth-Century British Evangelicalism,” 212.

¹⁸ Lewis, *The Origins of Christian Zionism*, 10.

¹⁹ Fuse-Roberts, “The Victorian Evangelical Shaftsbury: A Son of the Clapham Sect or a Brother of the Recordites?,” 127.

²⁰ Lewis, “Evangelicals and Jews Together?: Exploring the Roots of Christian Zionism,” 7.

²¹ Fuse-Roberts, “The Victorian Evangelical Shaftsbury: A Son of the Clapham Sect or a

began to petition Britain in the establishment of a Jewish state on the historic land of Israel²⁴ which would eventually lead to the drafting of the Balfour Declaration.²⁵

Shaftsbury wanted to right the wrongs of Britain when it banned Jews in 1920. He took notice of how Britain and Holland prospered when it began taking in and assisting Jews whereas Spain declined after expelling Jews, believing such international matters to be a fulfillment of Genesis 12:3.²⁶ Shaftsbury wished to reform society and assist the “victim” in which he considered Jews as a victim of persecution. He also believed in a return of the Jews to their homeland in Israel. He wished for Britain to lead the way in aiding the Jewish people in order to receive God’s blessing upon the British empire. His work among both Jewish evangelization while serving in the LSJ, as well as his efforts at the reestablishment of a Jewish state in the land of Israel and the return of the Jews to that land, served to dramatically further the cause of Christian Zionism.

William Hechler

William Hechler served as one of the key players in Christian Zionism from the standpoint of Anglican clergy. Like Lord Shaftsbury, Hechler served in the LSJ,²⁷ and he believed

Brother of the Recordites?’,” 121.

²². Lewis, *The Origins of Christian Zionism*, 115.

²³. Rowland S. Ward, “A Passion for God and a Passion for Jews: The Basis and Practice of Jewish Mission 1550–1850,” *The Reformed Theological Review* 70 (2011): 20–21.

²⁴. Yaakov Ariel, “An Unexpected Alliance: Christian Zionism and Its Historical Significance,” *Modern Judaism* 26 (2006): 74.

²⁵. McDermott, *Israel Matters: Why Christians Must Think Differently About the People and the Land*, 38–39.

²⁶. McDermott, *Israel Matters: Why Christians Must Think Differently About the People and the Land*, 38–39.

that the land of Israel still belonged to the Jews based on God's promise to Abraham.²⁸ He later became aware of the Jewish Zionist leader and father of political Zionism²⁹ Theodor Herzl³⁰ and wrote a booklet in 1882 on *The Restoration of the Jews to Palestine*.³¹ Hechler read Herzl's work *Der Judenstaat*,³² and he became a valuable adviser to Herzl and introduced Herzl to Grand Duke of Baden.³³

Herzl called for the First Zionist Conference in which Hechler played a role in securing evangelical Christian Zionists in attendance. The conference was to be held in Munich, but was transferred to Basel due to local Jewish opposition in Munich. The conference took place on August 28, 1897, in which Herzl was elected President of the newly formed World Zionist Organization. The goal of the organization was the uniting and resettlement of the Jewish people to the land of Israel, the strengthening of a Jewish national movement in the land of Israel, and to

²⁷. Enzo Maass, "FORGOTTEN PROPHET: William Henry Hechler and the Rise of Political Zionism," *Nordisk Judaistik* 23 (2003): 161.

²⁸. Maass, "FORGOTTEN PROPHET: William Henry Hechler and the Rise of Political Zionism," 185.

²⁹. Yaakov Ariel, "Israel in Contemporary Evangelical Christian Millennial Thought," *Numen* 59 (2012): 463.

³⁰. Maass, "FORGOTTEN PROPHET: William Henry Hechler and the Rise of Political Zionism," 165.

³¹. Maass, "FORGOTTEN PROPHET: William Henry Hechler and the Rise of Political Zionism," 162.

³². Jerry Klinger, "Reverend William H. Hechler - The Christian Minister Who Legitimized Theodor Herzl," accessed October 19, 2021. http://jewishmag.com/145mag/herzl_hechler/herzl_hechler.htm.

³³. Ariel, "An Unexpected Alliance: Christian Zionism and Its Historical Significance," 78.

work with other governments to fulfill the goals of Zionism.³⁴ While Herzl was the architect of the World Zionist Organization, without the assistance of Hechler, Herzl would not have had access to the wealth of dignitaries to help launch his political Zionist agenda, and Herzl's influence in bringing others into the Christian Zionist movement helped to further Herzl's ultimate goals.

The work of Lord Shaftsbury and William Hechler could be seen as a precursor to the modern Christians United for Israel movement and paved the way for the eventual drafting of the Balfour Declaration, which was Britain's most important development concerning the land of Israel between the First Zionist Conference and the 1948 establishment of Israel.³⁵ It was written by British Foreign Secretary Arthur James Balfour who wrote to Baron Lionel Walter Rothschild in support for a Jewish state within the historic land of Israel.³⁶ While there were some political reasons contributing to the drafting of the Balfour Declaration, it was Christian Zionists who dramatically helped pave the way for Britain's support of the reestablishment of a Jewish nation in the land of Israel and directly influenced the Balfour Declaration's eventual drafting.³⁷ Even Lord Balfour's Christian background came with a respect for the Jewish people, and he wished to give back to the those in whom the foundation of Christianity was birthed. Political Zionism and movements such as Herzl would not have taken off had it not been for Christian Zionists who were deeply involved in the cause.³⁸

³⁴. "Zionist Congress: First Zionist Congress and Basel Program," accessed October 19, 2021. <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/first-zionist-congress-and-basel-program-1897>.

³⁵. Lewis, *The Origins of Christian Zionism*, 1.

³⁶. Rodney Mazinter, "The Balfour Declaration: Its Genesis, Birth and Historical Significance," *Jewish Affairs* 72 (2017).

³⁷. Ariel, "Israel in Contemporary Evangelical Christian Millennial Thought," 79.

³⁸. Jim Gerrish, "Christians Remember Zion-Does God Play Favorites?" accessed October

New Christian Zionism

Historical Christian Zionism movements have contributed to a “New” Christian Zionism movement, a key player in the movement being Gerald McDermott. While McDermott does not subscribe to the theological position of dispensationalism in that Israel and Gentile nations run on separate “tracks,” he does embrace a Jew/Gentile distinction theology.³⁹ He also believes that Jews will return to the land of Israel⁴⁰ and embraces a Jewish state within Israel. He summarizes New Christian Zionism as follows: “God saves the world through Israel and the perfect Israelite; thus the Bible is incoherent and salvation impossible without Israel. We propose that the history of salvation is ongoing: the people of Israel and their land continue to have theological significance.”⁴¹ McDermott’s New Christian Zionism is not merely political, it is an exegetical and hermeneutical understanding of the biblical text that is a useful dialog partner with dispensationalists.⁴²

Christian Zionism and a positive theological value of Israel within Anglican evangelicalism has also influenced modern and recent Anglican evangelical scholars, such as those from Moore Theological College. Donald Robinson was heavily influenced by Anglican evangelicalism’s positive theological value of Israel and adhered to a Jew/Gentile distinction theology. ⁴³Grame Goldsworthy brought Robinson’s position to the masses, and while he drifted

19, 2021. <http://www.churchisraelforum.com/favorites-13/>.

³⁹. McDermott, *Israel Matters: Why Christians Must Think Differently About the People and the Land*, ix-xii.

⁴⁰. McDermott, *Israel Matters: Why Christians Must Think Differently About the People and the Land*, xiv.

⁴¹. McDermott, *The New Christian Zionism: Fresh Perspectives on Israel and the Land*, 12.

⁴². McDermott, *The New Christian Zionism: Fresh Perspectives on Israel and the*

away from some of the Jew/Gentile distinction in earlier writings, he has more closely re-aligned with Robinson in later writings.⁴⁴ Lionel Windsor is a recent example of a theology close to Robinson's, developing it from a "post-supercessionist" perspective.⁴⁵

Those Against

Not every Anglican evangelical has embraced a positive theological value of Israel or Christian Zionism. J.I. Packer aligned with a supercessionist reading of the biblical text that sees a continuity between the church and Israel.⁴⁶ He views the church as the covenant people of God who have inherited the promises of Old Testament Israel, even applying the Abrahamic Covenant directly to the church. The new "chosen people" of God are believers that comprise the New Testament church.⁴⁷ Packer's position is also fleshed out by scholars from Moore Theological College such as Broughton Knox who adheres to a similar position regarding the church and Israel and William Dumbrell who fleshed out his position on the new Israel being a "redeemed worshipping community."⁴⁸

Land, 320–21.

⁴³. Chase R. Kuhn, *The Ecclesiology of Donald Robinson and D. Broughton Knox: Exposition, Analysis, and Theological Evaluation* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2017), Chapter 5.

⁴⁴. Lionel Windsor, *Paul and the Vocation of Israel: How Paul's Jewish Identity Informs His Apostolic Ministry, with Special Reference to Romans* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014), 23–24.

⁴⁵. Windsor, *Paul and the Vocation of Israel: How Paul's Jewish Identity Informs His Apostolic Ministry, with Special Reference to Romans*, 68.

⁴⁶. J. I. Packer, "One Body in Christ: The Doctrine and Expression of Christian Unity," *The Churchman* 80 (1966): 19.

⁴⁷. James I. Packer, "Basic Christian Doctrines: 36: The Nature of the Church," *Christianity Today* (1962).

⁴⁸. David Broughton Knox, "The Church and the People of God in the Old Testament," *The Reformed Theological Review* 10 (1951): 12; William J. Dumbrell, *The End of the*

The Reverend Dr. Munther Isaac is an example of a “Palestinian” who rejects Christian Zionism as an “imperial theology” and considers the Jewish state of Israel as an “occupation” by the Jews. He believes that Christian Zionists have defended Jews and the nation of Israel at the expense of aid to the “Palestinians,” lamenting that at times it seems that “Palestinians do not exist” to evangelicals who adhere to Christian Zionism.⁴⁹ His argument is one contribution to a modern-day “Balfour Project” which seeks to do for the “Palestinians” what the Balfour Declaration did for the creation of the state of Israel.⁵⁰

A mediating position that incorporates a positive value of Israel is Resolution 24 of the Lambeth Conference. It recognizes the existence of the state of Israel (in agreement with Christian Zionism) while affirming the right of the “Palestinians” to form their own state (in agreement with the “Balfour Project”).⁵¹

Conclusion

Anglican evangelicals throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries broke with supercessionism and argued for a positive theological value of Israel, with key players directly involving themselves within the movement of Christian Zionism. The fruits of their labors

Beginning: Revelation 21–22 and the Old Testament, Moore College Lectures (New York: Lancer Books, 1985), 158.

⁴⁹. Rev. Dr. Munther Isaac, “Christian Zionism as Imperial Theology,” accessed October 20, 2021. <https://balfourproject.org/christian-zionism/> This student would argue that there needs to be a paradigm shift in the lexicon from “Palestinians” to “Arabs” concerning the relationship between Jews and Arabs in Israel and the Middle East. Such would allow for a more enriching discussion on such a relationship, but such is the focus of another paper.

⁵⁰. “Balfour Project: About,” accessed October 20, 2021. <https://balfourproject.org/about-2/>.

⁵¹. “Resolution 24 - Palestine/Israel,” accessed October 20, 2021. <https://www.anglicancommunion.org/resources/document-library/lambeth-conference/1988/resolution-24-palestineisrael?subject=International+relations>.

contributed to the Balfour Declaration and the recognition of the Jewish state in Israel, as well as have influenced modern New Christian Zionism and scholars within Anglican evangelicalism who continue to push for a positive theological value of Israel. While not all of Anglican evangelicalism is on board with such movements, there is still a group within Anglican evangelicalism who continue to be an advocate for the nation of Israel today, drawing on a rich history of Anglican evangelicalism's contribution to Christian Zionism.

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